

# SOUND CHANGE IN BERNESE GERMAN – ILLUSTRATED BY STAUB’S LAW

## Bernese German

Bernese German is the general term for the Swiss German dialects spoken in the Canton of Bern. Swiss German Dialects are all Alemannic dialects. The Bernese German dialects are divided into three main groups: the northern and the southern dialects and the dialects of the Bernese Highlands.

This project deals with the northern and the southern Bernese German dialects and the isoglosses which part the two areas.

## Staub’s Law

VnF → V:F or diphthongisation of the vowel  
e.g. [fʊnf] → [fy:f] or [fæɪf] (five)

Staub’s law was postulated by Friedrich Staub in 1877. In his article *Ein schweizerisch-alemannisches Lautgesetz*, Staub pointed out that this sound law is also to be found in other idg. languages, as for instance in Greek.

For the research area of the present project (Berner Mittelland), sound changes according to Staub’s law are frequently documented in the Atlas of German-speaking Switzerland. Changes of this type are features of the rural Bernese German dialects, which are recognised with a slightly lower social prestige than urban Bernese German dialects.

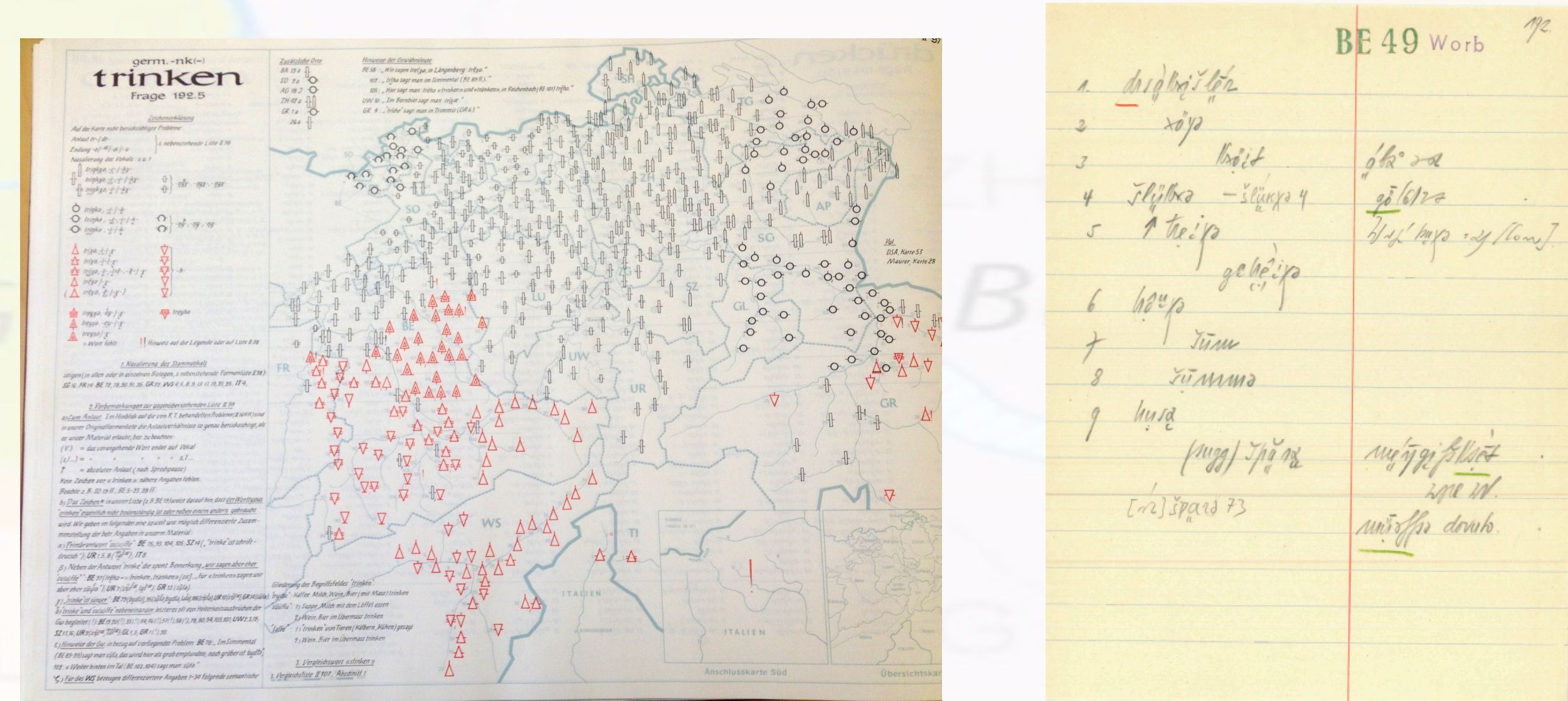
Sound changes according to Staub’s law are expected to decline, already Werlen 1977 gives two possible explanations for this decline:

- a. The coexistence of Standard German forms which do not undergo sound change according to Staub's law and
- b. The low social prestige of diphthongs, which normally result from changes according to Staub's law.

## Atlas of German-speaking Switzerland

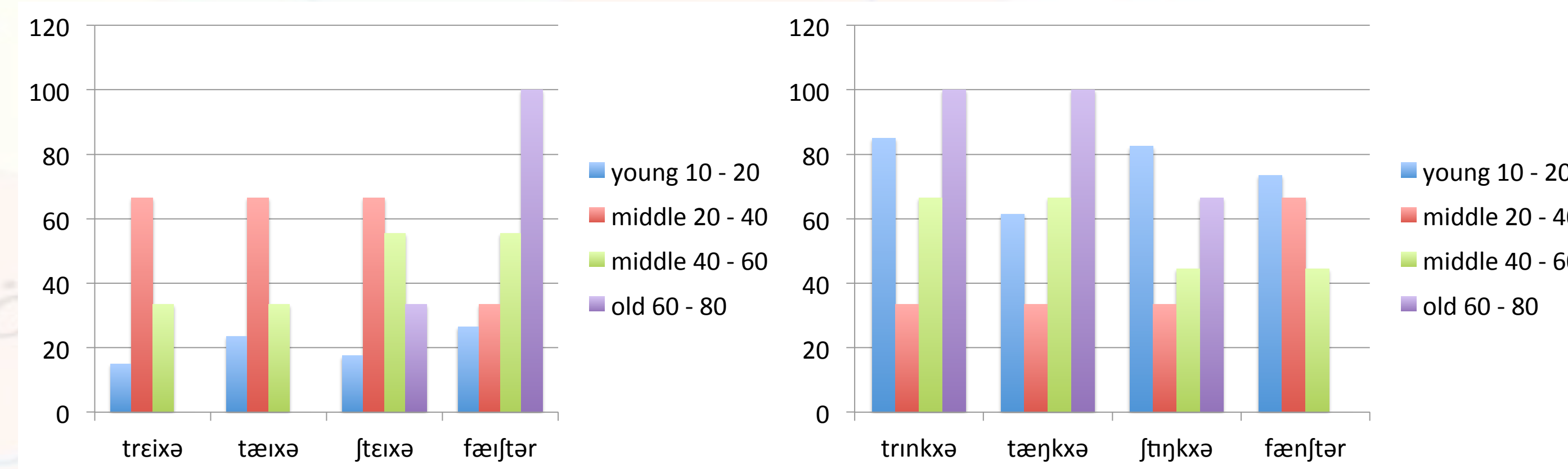
The idea for the Atlas of German-speaking Switzerland was brought up by Hotzenköcherle and Baumgartner in 1935. First interviews took

place in 1939, the full data collection was finished 19 years later, in 1958. The Atlas was published in 8 volumes between 1962 and 1997, containing the data of 1500 informants and 600 places.



## Pilot Study in Hasle-Rüegsau

Prior to the present project, a pilot study was carried out in Hasle-Rüegsau. This place was already in the Atlas of German-speaking Switzerland documented as an unstable area, where realisations according to Staub’s law were coexisting to the unchanged forms. The two diagrams below show the realisation of the 4 variables *drink*, *think*, *stink* and *window* according to Staub’s law (left) and unchanged (right):



The diagrams do not show a clear picture and there is no decline of Staub’s law visible. The pilot study found even more variation than the Atlas of German-speaking Switzerland has documented.

## PhD project

Research question:

- How and why did the Bernese German dialects within the research area change in the last 80 years?

In the present project, 20 places in the Berner Mittelland are

examined. Therefore, 4 interviews in 4 age groups are recorded at each place. The resulting data is finally compared with the data of the Atlas of German-speaking Switzerland, whereby sound change is made visible.

## Selection of Data

Bern 1944	Bern 2016	Worb 1940	Worb 2016	Belp 1945	Belp 2016	Rüeggis-berg 1942	Rüeggis-berg 2017
trinkche	trinkche	treiche	trinkche	triiche	trinkche	triiche	trinkche, treiche, triiche

The table above shows first results of the examination of Staub’s law in the research area. Whereas the variable *to drink* was realised by the majority according to the discussed sound law in the 1940s (blue), a decline in variation is visible today. The majority of the examined places are realising the variable in the unchanged way (red). Also the coexistence of both realisations is visible (cf. Data for Rüeggisberg).

## Result

We suggest, that the explanations given by Werlen in 1977 were right, as the rural areas (Worb, Belp, Rüeggisberg) show the predicted decline in realisation according to Staub’s law. This result is influenced by the presence of the Standard German form *trinken*, as Standard German forms are more frequently used today than 80 years ago.

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